

## **B.C. offers \$1,000 cheques, but will it bridge the gap?; Three more dead as province passes bill with 12 sitting members**

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### **Body**

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A dozen members of B.C.'s legislature gathered Monday to pass emergency legislation, including a novel \$1,000 cash payment to struggling British Columbians - the kind of payout experts say may become increasingly necessary across the country if the coronavirus pandemic continues for long.

The 87-seat legislature was only one-seventh occupied as members observed social distancing rules set out by provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry, sitting spaced out by at least one to two metres as they agreed on a \$5-billion emergency plan to combat the effects of COVID-19, which has taken the lives of 13 people in the province - three of which were announced earlier Monday.

"It seems inconceivable that just over a month ago, we announced a balanced budget," Horgan said in a news conference before the legislature sitting. "Today, we're all gathered looking forward ... how can we pull together to make sure we come out of this as well as we possibly can?"

Financial aid for B.C. residents includes a cash payment of \$1,000, tax free, to those unable to work as a result of the pandemic. The move echoed calls last week from U.S. Republican Senator Mitt Romney for every adult American to immediately receive a \$1,000 (U.S.) cheque.

The immediacy of the payment is not assured - Finance Minister Carole James said that after applications are received and processed, money was likely to flow starting in May. A second payment for most B.C. households would come in the form of an increase to the existing climate action tax benefit, James said, with the money coming through in July.

Part of British Columbia's coronavirus package matched actions already taken by Ontario's emergency legislation last Thursday, including protections to prevent workers from being fired for self isolating during the pandemic.

Horgan said Monday's legislation - approving the \$1,000 (Canadian) payout, barring employers from firing workers for observing social distancing rules, and a \$1.5 billion fund for future stimulus - is just the first step the province may take as it reels from the impacts of the virus.

The province also announced plans to pour \$1.7 billion into program support for vulnerable people during the crisis, and to pause all student loan payments, which are interest free in B.C.

Iglika Ivanova, senior economist for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in B.C., said the \$1,000, combined with the emergency benefit promised by the federal government, was a "good start" to helping people combat the crisis.

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But she said that depending on how long the pandemic continues, provinces and the federal government may have to offer more money in order for families to make ends meet.

"We know that a lot of people are living paycheque to paycheque and will not be able to wait until May," Ivanova said.

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